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NEGRO ORGANIZATIONS

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The account of the organized effort for self-help among Negroes in this country, since the Civil War, is incomplete without at least a brief mention of the ante-bellum organizations which were the forerunners of later efforts, many of which have become national in scope. When we consider the difficulties that confronted the members of the National Negro Convention of 1830, the courage of the signers of the petition of 1780 and the desperate bravery that marks some of the slave uprisings we are forced to wonder at the pathetic failure of some of the attempts at organization among the freedmen of America since the Civil War.

The uprising of the slaves in New York in 1812 was the first of the ten slave insurrections recorded by American historians. There were eight insurrections among the Southern Negroes, some of which were well planned and led by men who were determined to achieve freedom at all costs. The names of "Nat" Turner, Denmark Vasey, "General Gabriel" and Peter Poyas lend a romance to American history that the later champions of freedom have scarcely equaled.

The first organized effort among freedmen was probably the action of seven men at Dartmouth, Mass., who, on February 10, 1780, presented to the governor of Massachusetts Bay, a petition against the system of taxation without representation as practiced against the freedmen of New England. They asked that the benefits of the Revolution be extended to all free people regardless of color. Many of the later organizations among Negroes have had the same object in view, but the daring of the signers of this petition has never been surpassed.

The first national convention among Negroes, was doubtless the convention of freedmen which met at Philadelphia, September 15, 1830. It was the result of an effort on the part of Hezekiah Grice of Baltimore, to call together a group of representative free Negroes, to consider the various emigration schemes recommended to the American black men of that time. The organization adopted the

name of Convention of Colored Men. Among the leading spirits were Rt. Rev. Richard Allen, founder and bishop of the A. M. E. Church; Rt. Rev. Christopher Rush, one of the founders and first bishop of the A. M. E. Zion Connection, and the Rev. W. C. Pennington, a Presbyterian minister and noted scholar. Following a two days' discussion the convention endorsed the Canadian emigration plan, at the same time condemning the American Colonization Society and its West African effort. The conference adjourned to meet the first week in June, 1831. Little is known of the next conference except that several plans for the betterment of freedmen were discussed and that Hezekiah Grice, the founder, was not present. Mr. Grice was at Baltimore engaged in the formation of what was probably the first legal rights convention among Negroes in the United States. This association proposed to ascertain the legal status of the Afro-American freedmen. The white attorneys of that day refused to commit themselves on this dangerous question and the association, failing in its object, soon passed out of existence.

There were other conventions following that of 1831; there is an account of one held at Syracuse, N. Y., September 15, 1864, over which Frederick Douglass presided with the Hon. John M. Langston, Wm. H. Day, Jonathan C. Gibbs and Henry Highland Garnett among the delegates. Mr. Douglass in an address stated that the purpose of the convention was to "promote the freedom, progress, elevation and enfranchisement of the entire colored people of the nation." It was resolved at this conference to form an equal rights committee, whose function was to promote state equal rights leagues throughout the country. Several such bodies were formed during the latter half of the sixties; the first of these was the state equal rights congress of colored people of Pennsylvania, which met at Harrisburg, February 8 to 10, 1865. The Harrisburg meeting instituted a number of subordinate leagues and brought into the work men and women from all parts of the state. The branches soon became important factors of the conventions of colored men, whose influence extends to the present day. Wm. Nesbit, of Altoona, opened the convention at Washington, D. C., January 13, 1869. Joseph Bustill, of Philadelphia, presented a protest against the partial exclusion of colored people from the franchise after the passage of the fourteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States. A resolution was adopted during the session to petition the

Senate on behalf of the colored people. The establishment of an industrial and manual training school for Negroes at New Haven, Conn., was also recommended.

It is worthy of note that the first Negro anti-slavery convention was held at Philadelphia, June 4, 1832. The anti-slavery convention also condemned the West African colonization scheme, advised the colored people not to emigrate to Liberia or to Hayti, and endorsed the Canadian plan. A striking feature of this convention is that they recommended the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States to be read at all conventions: "believing that the truths contained in the former are incontrovertible and that the latter guarantees, in letter and spirit, to every freeman in this country all the rights and immunities of citizenship."

The period immediately following the Civil War shows very little activity among Negroes on an independent basis. The convention of colored men continued its sessions at irregular periods, and several local associations with the same object in view came into existence during the latter part of the sixties. The early reconstruction days were times of coöperation between the Northern white sympathizers and the Negro. The active men and women of the darker race gave the greater part of their energy to the more intensive work of helping their recently liberated brethren in the South. Political organization and local problems of adjustment consumed their time and under the new spirit of coöperation the national questions and the Negroes' grievances were considered with the help of white organizations. The independent Negro churches received great impetus during this period and new ones sprang into existence, Negro secret and benevolent orders came into being, and older ones added a large number of local orders in the South. The Colored Order of the Knights of Pythias was started in 1864, the Independent Order of St. Luke in 1867 and the United Order of Moses in 1868. The first Colored Y. M. C. A. was organized in 1866, and the first students' association in 1869. Wm. A. Hunton was the first colored international secretary. In 1881 the National Women's Christian Temperance Union started its work among colored women, Mrs. Jane Kenny, being the first superintendent. Mrs. Frances E. Harper followed her in 1883.

As a result of an inspiration that occurred to Mr. T. Thomas

Fortune, the Afro-American Protective League came into existence. Its first efforts were put forth in 1887 and within the year many local organizations were formed. The objects of the League were to protest against taxation without representation, to secure a more equitable distribution of school funds, where separate schools were maintained, and to fight legal discrimination and lynch law. They further proposed to assist in the emigration of Negroes from sections rendered intolerable for them through the conduct of the lawless whites. They proposed to help create a healthful sentiment between the two races and to promote the character and reputation of the colored people. At its inception the League was supported with a great deal of enthusiasm but the second year of its existence showed a discouraging lack of interest. In the national convention of 1890, however, 22 states and territories were represented with 141 delegates seated. The League took up the work of the older conventions which has continued to the present day passing to the Afro-American Council, the Niagara Movement and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The American Association of Educators of Colored Youth held its first meeting in 1889. "Any person in any way connected with the training of youth or engaged in the welfare of the race is eligible to membership." The subjects for discussion at the annual meetings included "Manual Training," "The College-bred Negro," "Disfranchisement," "The Teacher in Race Development," and "Industrial Training and Higher Education." Its officers and members included most of our noted educators and public spirited men and women. The names of Dr. Booker T. Washington, Mrs. Frances E. Harper, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, and Mrs. F. L. Coppin appear on its reports. The Association offered the only means for many colored teachers to take part in the discussion of their school problems.

The colored press convention held its first great meeting at Washington, D. C., March 5, 1889. There were press conventions prior to this, but the deliberations of the body at this convention, the speeches, including the address of welcome by the Hon. John M. Langston, marks it as the real beginning of the organization. The majority of the Negro publications were represented and definite plans for the promotion of the Negro press were formulated. A statistical committee was formed to tabulate the Negro publica-

tions for permanent reference. The methods of Negro journalists were discussed. A remarkable feature was that several members owed their eligibility to the fact that they were employed on daily papers as correspondents and as reporters. There had been Negro press conferences previous to 1889; there have been conventions since then, but the convention at Washington was the first to bring forward practical plans for coöperation and advance among the Negro journalists of this country.

The Tuskegee Conference held its first annual meeting at Tuskegee, Ala., in 1890. The organization of the Negro farmers for mutual improvement and the study of better methods through these conferences has been a great boon, especially to the Southern men who lack the contact so necessary for advance in modern agricultural methods. As in other of Dr. Washington's efforts the conference is one of the most active organizations among colored people. Many other institutions for colored people hold conferences each year.

The National Association of Physicians, Dentists and Pharmacists of the United States of America was organized in 1895. Since that time it has extended its influence throughout the country. Papers on technical subjects, social aspects of medicine, the physician and the community and other social and ethnic problems are read. Colored physicians and laymen attach great importance to the deliberations of this body. The good work accomplished through its conventions cannot be overestimated. Dr. N. F. Mossell, founder of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital, Dr. Daniel H. Williams, noted physician and surgeon, and Dr. E. C. Bentley, of Chicago, Ill., are among its members.

The first meeting of the National Federation of Colored Men was held at Detroit, Mich., in 1895. This Federation was formed for the social, economic and political uplift of the colored people of the country. It is practically committed to the Republican party. The leading spirits in it are members of the legal profession. Its influence has not been so extensive as was at first predicted, though many local Leagues are doing effective work, but the alliance of these is not a close one.

It is difficult to conceive of a more important organization than the National Association of Colored Women and its branches. The Association was founded in 1896. Some of its functions are the establishment of kindergartens, mothers' meetings and sewing classes,

the establishment of a sanatorium, and a general neighborhood welfare work. It is pledged to combat the "jim crow" laws, lynchings, and the convict lease system. About 800 local clubs report to the National Association of Colored Women. A list of 200 clubs was selected and it was found that the membership of the clubs listed was 10,908, that they had collected in two years nearly \$82,500, that the cost of the property owned by these clubs is nearly \$62,000, with a present valuation of \$113,332.25. Some of the local clubs have established reformatories, old folks' homes, day nurseries, working girls' clubs and social settlements. Among the studies reported by the locals were civics, art, literature, needlework and domestic science.

The American Negro Academy, founded 1895, is an organization perfected by Rev. Alexander Cromwell, of which Dr. DuBois is president. Hon. Archibald H. Grimke, Prof. Kelly Miller and Rev. Frank Grimke are among its members. The most important features of the academy, to the race, are the "Occasional Papers" series published and distributed by it.

Closely akin to the Academy is the American Negro Historical Society of Philadelphia, founded in 1897. "The object of this society is to collect relics, literature, and historical facts, relative to the Negro race, illustrating their progress and development in this country. It is the ultimate purpose of this Society to secure title to a permanent home for its meetings and a safe deposit for its effects." Rev. Henry L. Phillips, Rev. Matthew Anderson and William C. Bolivar are among its members.

The National Business League is a chartered body founded by Dr. Booker T. Washington. The League is the most virile institution of a purely secular nature among Negroes of the present generation. Its first meeting was held at Boston in 1890. There are 11 state leagues affiliated with it, 221 chartered local leagues located in 32 states of the Union, Jamaica and the British West Indies. Including the chartered organizations there are 450 local leagues allied with the National body, 4 large national associations, the first of which is the National Negro Bankers' Association, which was organized in 1906; it represents 64 Negro banks, capitalized at \$1,600,000 with an annual business of \$20,000,000. The National Association of Funeral Directors was organized in 1907. Its members include men from all parts of the country. The value of their

business cannot be expressed in less than ten figures. Some idea of the importance of the National Press Association, organized in 1909, may be gleaned from the fact that there are 398 periodicals published by Negroes in this country, including 249 newspapers. There is also a western Negro Press Association that has done a great deal to stimulate the Negro journalist of the Western States. The Negro Bar Association, the fourth affiliated national association, was also organized in 1909 and includes among its members some of the foremost legal authorities of the race. The Business League, with its locals and four great associations, is the most extensive organization among Negroes. It represents the commercial, business and industrial activities of the race.

The National League for the Protection of Colored Women, organized in 1906, has important local branches in New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk. The objects of the association are the protection, industrial advancement and education of colored women. Its most extensive work is its free employment bureaus, neighborhood houses and rescue work. Many cases of preventive work among the colored women, through Mrs. Layten, secretary of the Philadelphia Association, are known to the writer. It is now one of the three affiliated bodies of the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes which was formed by a group of social workers and philanthropists of both races who were on the boards of the committee on urban conditions among Negroes, the National Association for the Protection of Colored Women and the committee for improving the industrial condition of Negroes in New York. The organization was perfected in 1911, Prof. E. R. A. Seligman is chairman and George E. Haynes, Ph.D., director.

The Negro race conferences have been held regularly since 1907. They are devoted to race adjustment and improvement through methods of self-help and to securing better opportunity by destroying unfair sentiment and laws against the Negro.

The National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, organized March 5, 1907, is similar to the teachers association organized in 1889. It is a stronger organization and bids fair to live long.

The Colored Graduate Nurses National Association came into existence in 1908. Their conventions are devoted to the demonstrations of foods, local remedies and sick-room requisites, practical demonstrations and papers upon such subjects as "Visiting Nurses

in Public Schools," "Nursing Among Mutes," and "The Ideal Nurse," as well as papers by practicing physicians.

The colored musical and art clubs came together as a national association for the first time in 1908. Since then they have held regular conventions devoted to the advancement of music and art.

The National Association for the Advancement of the Negro is championed by a large number of white friends of the race. Though not strictly a Negro creation, its official organ, the *Crisis*, "A record of the darker races," is edited by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois. The object of the Association is the lifting of the Negro through the destruction of the barriers of prejudice, the protection of those who suffer from unfair or brutal treatment and the extension of all educational facilities to include the Negro. The Association has many active local branches which meet local difficulties, calling in the national body when grave problems confront them. It was founded in 1909.

The National Business League decided at their annual meeting of 1909 to lend their influence towards the celebration of the emancipation of the American Negroes from slavery. Efforts were made to obtain a national appropriation for the celebration, but, failing to secure the necessary funds, state celebrations have been arranged, and several states have planned for expositions. The largest will probably be the fiftieth anniversary of the emancipation from slavery to be held at Philadelphia in September, 1913.

In November, 1909, a young woman of Woodstown, N. J., Miss Abigail Richardson, conceived the idea of calling together the colored farmers of that vicinity for the purpose of improving their economic condition through a more extensive method of farming. The movement is known as the Country Farm Association, and has been a success from the beginning. They propose to "keep close touch on the market and cost of marketing; encourage the purchase of land; visit farms operated by colored men, and direct their study and method of record-keeping; demonstrate methods of farming on the few acres of land at the farmers' disposal; circulate farm bulletins; keep the people informed concerning local and national movements which affect the farmer closely; conduct corn, potato and tomato clubs; and arrange programs for the meetings of the farmers' association; direct the annual fair and exhibit and teach fundamental principles of farming to children."

In 1910, the Negro National Educational Congress was started

and the National Independent Political League held its first meeting in the same year. Besides the independents, the Negroes have a Democratic league and a Republican organization of considerable strength. Nearly every group of Negro voters has some kind of political club, organization or association.

Besides the institutions mentioned above, the Negroes of the United States have a large number of secret orders, some of which have attained the dignity of national organizations; for instance, The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, the Order of Elks, and the National Order of Mosaic Templars. The great majority of the older secret organizations may be found among the colored people. Their importance is probably second only to the Negro church activities. The phenomenal growth of the Negro beneficial insurance companies is one of the signs of progress within the race; these institutions operate all over the country and give employment to thousands of black men and women. The Mutual and Provident Beneficial Company of Durham, N. C., the National Benefit Company of Washington, D. C., the Keystone Aid Society of Philadelphia, Pa., are good examples of Negro insurance companies of the best type. Law and order leagues, literary societies, Christian and educational congresses, professional and business clubs, trade guilds and labor unions, may be found in the Negro communities.

The Negro is well provided with national and state organizations for self-help. He has professional and business clubs, charity organizations, social settlements and centers, neighborhood clubs, benevolent associations and institutions devoted to social functions.